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STEPHEN MACK, FIRST SETTLER OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY.

BY CORNELIUS BUCKLEY.

Previous to the year 1832 the region designated the Rock River Valley was practically unknown to the general public. The mining country in Illinois and Wisconsin contained a few embryo settlements in the early 20's. At different points on the banks of the Rock River a shifting trader's cabin might be seen during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The names of some of those traders are known to us; but they cannot be classed as permanent settlers. With the advent of the latter their occupation ceased. They were not tillers of the soil or builders of towns and villages. They finally followed in the wake of the Red man across the great river and prairies to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

John Dixon, the founder of the present city of that name, has pretty generally been distinguished as the first permanent settler of Rock River Valley; and for the apparent reason that local historians and authors of county histories, either from want of knowledge, or by reason of a sense of false modesty, have never asserted the prior claim of Stephen Mack of Rockton and Macktown.

In recent years different sketches, more or less mythical in character, concerning Mack's career on Rock River have been recited at old settlers' meetings, and have appeared in the public prints.

His few intimate early associates who probably knew something of his personal history—Robert J. Cross, Jesse Blinn, and others—have long since passed away. From what we do know concerning his personality, we may fairly conclude that he was of modest demeanor and inclined to be non-communicative in regard to his family, his youth, and early adventures in the West.

Owing to the fortunate result of a correspondence with Mrs. Lillian D. Avery, Secretary of the Oakland County Historical Society, Pontiac, Michigan, and Mrs. Carrie Mack Newberry of Pontiac, the youngest daughter of Stephen Mack of Macktown, the writer is able to lay before the public some interesting facts and data not heretofore published, or even known in the vicinity, pertaining to the first settler of Winnebago County, Illinois, and likely the first settler in the Valley of the Rock River.

Stephen Mack came from good old Revolutionary stock. He was a native of Tunbridge, Vermont, born in the month of February, 1798, the son of Stephen Mack, Sr., and Temperance Bond of Gilsum, New Hampshire. The father of our subject, Colonel Stephen Mack, Sr., was a native of Lyme, Connecticut, where he was born in 1764, the son of Solomon Mack. Both father and son served in the Continental Army during the Revolution. After his marriage in 1788, Colonel Mack settled at Tunbridge, Vermont, engaged in mercantile business, and kept a tavern. He was commissioned a Colonel of a militia regiment, and took great interest in military matters. About the year 1807 he settled in Detroit, then a struggling frontier village, leaving his wife and twelve children in Vermont.

At Detroit he engaged in the mercantile business, including the fur trade, and for many years the firm of Mack and Conant was known and rated high among the enterprising mercantile establishments of the West. Colonel Mack was present and witnessed the humiliating spectacle of Hull's surrender of the fort at Detroit to the British in 1812. He served as trustee of the Village of Detroit and was a member of the reception committee on the visit of President Monroe to Detroit in 1817. He was a Director of the Bank of Michigan; and on the collapse of that institution his entire estate was exhausted to satisfy claims against a defaulting cashier whose bond he had signed. He finally settled on the present site of Pontiac, and became the founder of that city, where he built a dam, a grist mill, and a saw mill. He died at Pontiac on November 11th, 1826. Many of his descendants are well-known residents of Michigan at the present day. His family moved from Vermont to Detroit in 1822.

His son, Stephen Mack, Jr., came to Rock River about 1822, settling at Grand Detour, and later at Bird's Grove, adjacent to the present site of Ho-no-ne-gah Park, two miles east of Rockton. Here William and Thomas Talcott found him on July 25th, 1835. A trader's license was issued to Mack to trade at Rock River on October 20, 1823, and again on September 6, 1824, and October 5, 1826, four years before the advent of Mr. Dixon. At Grand Detour he married a Potawatomie woman, Ho-no-ne-gah, said to have been the daughter of a chief. Later in life he had this Indian marriage confirmed by a ceremony before Justice of the Peace Hulin at Rockton. Eleven children were born to Mack and Ho-no-ne-gah as the fruit of this marriage, nine of whom reached adult years.

Ho-no-ne-gah, from all accounts, was an intelligent, thrifty, and industrious woman, neat in appearance and deportment, and very skillful in the use of the needle. She died at Macktown in July, 1847, leaving a child about one year old, now Mrs. Carrie Mack Newberry, of Pontiac, Michigan.

Mack continued in the fur trade at Bird's Grove until the autumn of 1835, when he settled on the bluff at the mouth of the Pecatonica, where in 1839 he erected a large frame residence still standing, and well preserved.

In this house he died suddenly on April 10th, 1850. Dark rumors were afloat in the neighborhood of Macktown for years, implying that his death was caused by poison, administered by a person—no blood relative—materially benefited by his death. He was buried by the side of Ho-no-ne-gah and a son Henry, a few yards from his house.

On May 19th, 1880, the remains of Stephen Mack, his wife Ho-no-ne-gah, and their son Henry, were removed from Macktown and re-interred in Phillips Cemetery, south-west of Macktown, where an appropriate tombstone marks their final resting place.

This act of benevolence was accomplished by his old friends then surviving, J. R. Jewett, William Halley, and R. R. Comstock.

An interesting incident in the life of Mack, and which has been vouched for by one of his early friends, was the visit of Black Hawk and a band of his warriors to the trading post at

Bird's Grove, on June 26th, 1832. A camp of Winnebagoes at the Grove entertained Black Hawk. Mack secreted himself on the island in the river, now owned by Philip Hauser, until the departure of the Sacs.

I can scarcely believe that Mack's life was in serious danger. He had great influence with the Winnebagoes, and very likely was personally known to Black Hawk.

During his long career in the Valley of the Rock River, Mack continued in the fur trade, disposing of his products to John Kinzie at Chicago, and Solomon Juneau of Milwaukee. At Macktown he built a spacious general store and conducted, with his cousin Merrill E. Mack, a general mercantile business. He also built at Macktown several private residences, none of which remain standing. He built a school house at Macktown, and the first bridge across Rock River in the State of Illinois, in 1843. This bridge was built with a draw, so that boats could pass up and down the Rock, and we well know that in Mack's day there was some steamboat traffic on Rock River. This bridge was swept away in the great flood of June 1st, 1851, and was never rebuilt. He served for years on the Board of Supervisors, and was one of the County Judges, under the old system at the time of his death.

Mack's children were well educated, and became useful members of society. His youngest daughter Carrie was taken in charge by the youngest brother of her father, Almon Mack of Rochester, Michigan, by whom she was raised and educated. She still resides at Pontiac, and has been Regent of the Pontiac Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

At the time of his death, Mack owned all of Section Twenty-three in Rockton township, south of the Pecatonica River, which with his Macktown farm, aggregated upward of one thousand acres. He received \$5000.00 from the United States as an interest due by reason of his children's relations with the Potowatomie Nation.

In his will he provided for an equal distribution of his estate among his children.

Stephen Mack was a cousin of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. His sister Almira Mack joined the Mormons at an early day, and followed their fortunes to Utah, where she was

living as late as 1876. Mrs. Mack, the mother of Stephen, joined her daughter Almira in 1846, and continued to reside with her until her death about 1856.

The want of more detailed information regarding this worthy citizen and first of pioneers is to be deeply regretted. His native modesty forbade his keeping a diary, and Rockton had no historical society to preserve a record of the interesting incidents in the busy and enterprising life of Stephen Mack. We may justly deplore the indifference which produces so regrettable a condition, while we endeavor to profit from the sad example.